

The Kids (That You Can Never Kill) by pansexualorgana (MaximumMarygold)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Dad!Steve, Gen, I never thought 'i would die for steve harrington' was a thing i would be saying in the year 2017, Slice of Life, but here we are, steve is a good brother dad friend babysitter

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Max (Stranger Things), Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven & Jim "Chief" Hopper, Eleven/Mike Wheeler, Jonathan Byers/Steve Harrington/Nancy Wheeler, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper, Probably - Relationship, Steve Harrington & Everyone, Steve Harrington & His Kids

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2017-11-07

Updated: 2018-03-17

Packaged: 2022-04-21 15:22:40

Rating: Not Rated

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 7

Words: 10,000

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Not necessarily chronological slices of life in Hawkins post-Mind Flayer

Most recent:

Steve swore up and down that he didn't pick favorites, he hated all of his little twerps equally (now get off of the cruiser, it's not a jungle gym, you brats!)

But he didn't go out of his way for the other's the way he did for Max.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

yall i just really love all of my children and my new mom and dad

The idea came, as a lot of the basis of Steve Harrington's life choices seemed to nowadays, from Dustin. And seriously, the twerp needed to bug off and go live his *own* life instead of trying to help steer a guy five years older than him away from stagnating in the small town life.

It was an offhand comment, while Max tried to teach Will how to skateboard to varying degrees of dismal failure and uproarious cheering and Steve watched the lot of them like a hawk, ready to swoop in with the arsenal of bandaids he now kept in his pockets.

Dustin had lolled his head back, considering Steve carefully before he'd said, "Dude, why don't you just become a deputy?"

The initial response to the idea, of the mere thought of Steve Harrington, former badboy turned Damn Good Babysitter (™) working in law enforcement in any capacity was absolutely hilarious and he guffawed behind his hand right up until the moment that the rest of his brain caught up and went: *well, why not?*

He'd already been involved in saving the town and these (miscreant, annoying, clingy, wonderful) children twice. He'd gone up against things that could have and would have definitely killed him *twice* with a baseball bat and a can-do (*can't-afford-not-to-do*) attitude, and for half of the second time he had been concussed to hell and back.

Hell, the normal, petty crime of Hawkins would be easy. And then if things *did* go tits up(side down) again, he'd be one of the first to know. He'd work with Hopper, and he'd officially spent enough time around the guy to not be shit scared of him, and make enough money to get the hell *out* of his parent's place and subsequently their thumbs.

"You know what, kid," Steve had mumbled, distracted by all the new

possibilities as he settled a hand on Dustin's wild hair and ruffled the soft curls, "that's not a bad idea."

Not bad at all.

So, really, it was all Dustin's fault that six months after graduation, after he'd bid goodbye to Nancy and Jonathan with stinging eyes and a knot sitting where his heart should have been because somewhere along the line the hurt had faded into a dull pang and the lie he'd told (" *It's okay, Nance* ") became more or less true and he loved them both more than he could have ever imagined, after Jane Eleanor 'El' Hopper had been introduced to the general public as the sheriff's new daughter, after Will stopped radioing so often at three in the morning after nightmares, after *all* of it... Steve looked really dumb in his uniform.

"Don't be like that," Dustin admonished, lying diagonally across Steve's bed with Lucas and Max draped over him like chittery blankets, "you look great."

"It's so... *khaki* ." He said the word like one might refer to a mouse in the kitchen or a scuff mark on their brand new Camaro.

"Yeah, but look how good your butt looks," Max pointed out, smacking her gum smugly when Steve actually turned so his back was to the mirror so he could see for himself.

"Gross," Lucas complained, "he's like... like our *brother* or something. You can't tell him his butt looks good."

"Don't be jealous," Dustin rolled his eyes, "she meant it, like, objectively."

Max nodded her head, fiery hair falling into her face with the movement, "Definitely objective. No offence, but you're way too old for me."

That was an excellent state of mind and Steve vehemently hoped that she kept it, going forth into her Freshman year of high school with the rest of the twerps. He'd been a 12th grade boy not even a year

ago -- he remembered the locker room talk that made his stomach twist uncomfortably. 18 year old boys taking out 14 year old girls who didn't know any better. Getting them drunk. Taking advantage of them.

Vowing then and there to take a swing at any punk who so much as looked at one of his kids, Steve sort of wished he had a towel to point at her as he said, "Damn straight I am."

"Fuckin' nerd," Dustin mumbled as the other two little shits laughed at him.

"That's Deputy Fuckin' Nerd to you," Steve said, looking towards the clock on his wall, "and I've got to get to work which means that you three need to skedaddle."

"Aw," Lucas shifted so his head was hanging off the edge of the bed, "can't we come with you?"

"Absolutely not," he was still in his first week of deputy-ing, he wasn't about to have three baby faced teenagers follow him around like ducklings. Especially not when he knew that where they went, the *other* three were going to follow. He got enough of that off duty, thank you very much. "I'm looking forward to adult interaction."

Dustin looked scandalized, "Fine," he scoffed, hopping to his feet and nearly knocking Lucas and Max to the floor, "we'll go to the arcade."

"Haven't you gotten tired of watching me beat you, yet?" Max teased as she unfolded herself and stretched her arms above her head -- that was when Steve noticed the green stain on the edge of her baggy Hawkin's High t-shirt.

The green stain that came from Steve spilling paint on it two years ago in art class. When *he* was wearing it. Because it was *his* shit. Max looked over, caught his eye, and grinned.

"Hargrove, is that my--"

"Time to go!" She shouted, gripping both boys' hands and pulling them out his bedroom door and down the stairs, sounding more like a herd of stampeding water buffalo than three small children.

Road Runner had nothing on the rugrats when they'd been caught doing something questionable, that was for damn sure. Which explained how they survived not one, but two Demogorgon invasions. Still, Steve was going to get his shirt back. He'd been *looking* for it.

The most comfortable shirt in the world and it had been pilfered, from right under his nose, by a *toddler* .

His career as a detective was not off to a good start.

Though, getting to the station before Hopper despite his apparent magnetism for dorky teenagers was a definite boost to his sloping confidence.

What the hell was he doing? A deputy? Really? Hadn't the plan been to get *out* of Hawkins the second his fingers wrapped around his diploma?

It *had* been.

Except when he dropped into the almost comfortable chair at his desk, waving a nearly non-awkward wave at Flo as he did, he ended up staring at the one framed picture he'd bothered to bring.

All six of the 'Party' on their first day of highschool.

Dustin grinning with his arms around Will and Lucas, who looked far more appropriately apprehensive, though the Byers kid's smile, small as it was, met his eyes .

To Will's right was Wheeler, with his arms crossed, clearly unenthusiastic about the photo Ms. Byers was making them take. He'd complained about his mom doing the same thing before he'd even gotten to leave his house.

His look was diffused, however, by El who's smile could have blot out the damn *sun* she was so happy to have something normal in her life, for once. And good, she deserved it. One of her hands was clutching onto Mike's jacket, and the other was lifted up in a wave because she didn't quite get how polaroid camera's worked yet but that was okay, because she knew how to smile, and laugh, and do things that made

her happy and that was a long way from where she had been.

Max had her arm looped through Lucas' and she showed that she was 100% ready for whatever higher education had to throw at her by crossing her eyes and sticking out her tongue, her free hand on her hip only because Joyce had firmly refused to let her raise her middle finger for the picture.

They were such little *shits* but he couldn't just abandon them in the town that wanted to kill them every other month; and he kind of hated Jonathan and Nancy for doing just that. Abandoning the kids -- abandoning *him* like they didn't understand that they were a unit. A family.

Stronger *together* .

The rest of him, the part that made up the majority of who he was, was so, so glad that they were following their dreams. Jonathan would have been insane to turn down that Photography program. And Nancy, Nancy had the whole world in front of her. She had school's trying to *one up* each other to get her.

Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Caltech. They all wanted a piece of Nancy Wheeler.

She'd pressed a lingering kiss to his cheek before she'd left for Boston, promising to call at least twice a week. A promise that she had kept with gusto -- both she and Jonathan had. Three-Way calling was the best invention since the baseball bat, Steve was sure.

"Harrington!" Hopper barked as he entered the station, box of donuts held far above his head where Flo couldn't reach them to replace with some kind of fruit, "You're late!"

He was, by five minutes, but Hopper hadn't been there yet.

"How do you know?" He asked, curling his nose upwards, "You just got here." Flo hadn't even had time to tell on him, yet.

"I didn't," Hopper's stern look turned into a grin that could almost be described as *cheeky* , "but you gave yourself away."

Shit . “That’s cheating,” Steve accused, reaching for the box of pastries despite Flo’s disapproving frown -- he was only nineteen, he could eat whatever he wanted for a good five years, still.

“That’s detecting,” Hopper corrected him around a mouthful of his own donut. “What emergency did Henderson have this morning?”

Steve groaned and leant back in his chair, “He accidentally sprayed five pumps of hairspray instead of four.”

The sheriff’s booming laughter lingered even after he’d disappeared into his own office and Steve took a good solid moment to sulk about the absurdity of it all.

His *life* , man. What the hell even.

2. Chapter 2

Notes for the Chapter:

ok so A) the response to this was i n c r e d i b l e
you guys are all so sweet i was in tears all day
reading your comments and I love you <3

b) don't get used to this update a day thing because if
any of you have ever read anything else ive written
you know that updates are..... ha.

(i promise I'm working on Burning, Easy To Be
Brave, and Never Dreamed of Nobody Like You.
Promise promise promise.)

(I may even start up with Tinsel Town again with all
this festivity coming up)

Weird things happened in spades in Hawkins. Honestly, they got *way* more than their fair share of oddities and strange happenings. Case in point, Nancy Wheeler was climbing through Steve Harrington's window at *fuck* o'clock in the morning when he had to work in --he tilted his head to peek at the clock with his one open eye-- *Christ*, three and a half hours.

Just because *they* got off for Thanksgiving...

"If no one is dying, you had better turn right around and leave me the hell alone until my alarm goes off at six," he grumbled groggily before it hit him that *shit, this was Hawkins, and someone could very well be dying*.

He sat up, alertness hitting him like a mugful of scalding coffee to the face, suddenly sure that someone was on death's doorstep. The Gate had reopened, or something managed to not die when they'd closed it and had been hiding out for a year, or maybe their bad luck was just applicable to all areas of their lives at this point and there had been an accident, or--

"Steve!" Nancy snapped her fingers in front of his face twice until his

eyes focused on her face; she was beautiful, bare faced and wearing a shirt that had probably not started out as hers (and he wasn't jealous, really he wasn't. The pang in his chest was more like *longing*), "Ground Control to Major Bonehead, you in there?"

"Major Bonehead?" He croaked like one of those tiny frogs that Will liked to bring up from the creek and show him on days where the combined puppy eyes of six dorks was too much for him to refuse, "What are they teaching you at that fancy college?"

Over Nancy's shoulder, Jonathan snorted a quiet laugh and raked a hand through his hair. He'd cut it, at some point. It was still a shaggy mess but at least it looked that way on purpose. It looked good.

After making the executive decision that the lack of blood, screaming, and general calamity meant that this was a *very ill timed* social call, Steve collapsed back onto his pillows, pulling his comforter up and over his head as he went -- if they wanted to have a *conversation* at two-thirty-four in the morning, they could have it with his burrito form.

"Aw, come on Harrington," Jonathan goaded before a finger poked him somewhere around the general area of his kidneys, "where's your sense of adventure?"

Steve just groaned. The Gilmore kids had set three (3) sections of Wilkins' Farm on fire in the past week alone and he was *tired* , *you guys don't you understand* . He was literally dead. If they wanted to go out and be reckless college kids that was fine, but they could leave his poor, shambling corpse the hell out of it.

Someone, Nancy, settled herself next to him and started incessantly tugging on a lock of hair that had managed to escape from the blanket prison, "Steve," she said softly, "come on."

He was a good person.... Lately. He didn't deserve this.

He also, apparently, had exactly zero tolerance when it came to Wheeler's and Byer's (and Henderson's, and Hargrove's, and Sinclair's, and Hopper's) trying to manipulate his emotions until he did their bidding. None at all.

“Fine,” he grouched as he rolled out of bed and blindly looked for his shoes, “but I’m wearing my pajamas.”

Adventure . Who had time for that? Hadn’t they had enough adventures in high school, with the almost dying and whathaveyou? Steve had had it up to the tips of his hair with adventures.

Okay, so, not *all* adventures. He could think of worse things than 3 AM milkshakes with two of his favorite displaced people. They held hands under the table the whole time and sipped from the same glass like the adorable fucks they were and it didn’t hurt. Steve ripped his napkin into tiny pieces to ball up and throw at them, but the teasing was genuine.

He was happy that they were happy.

Everyone deserved happy.

“So,” Nancy started, her eyes bright like morning and afternoon had reversed themselves and she wasn’t the least bit tired, “deputy, huh?”

Steve rolled his eyes. It’s not like it was the first time they were hearing about it; they kept in constant contact. But it was the first time he was seeing them in person since he’d actually *been* deputized.

“Yeah, huh,” he said back, pointing his spoon at her warningly, “so you better watch it, missy. One wrong move and it’s off to the pokey with you.”

“The pokey?” She smiled, “That sounds unpleasant.”

“It is,” he assured her before turning to Jonathan, “same for you, Byers.”

“I’m terrified,” Jonathan deadpanned, “really.” He paused to take a long sip of his strawberry shake, “So, what’s it like working with Hopper all the time?”

Thoughtfully pursing his lips, Steve continued to wave his spoon around as he spoke --he wove things around a lot, lately, usually pens or dishtowels, occasionally Max’s skateboard, “Less terrifying than you would expect,” he said after a moment, “and a little

more...maintenance? Than the job description advertises.”

According to Flo, this was Hopper on a *good* streak. Since he abruptly got a very impressionable little girl dropped into his lap, he'd been making an effort to eat better, sleep more. Steve had even caught him on a walk when he was patrolling -- El's tiny hand clutched tightly in the sheriff's as she beamed at Steve and happily accepted the sucker he passed her out the window of his cruiser, Hopper grinning back at him through the gap. It was the kind of easy relaxation that the pair only had when they were together.

They were good for each other.

Even so, Steve kept an eye on him. Brought him lunch on days where it looked like he'd forgotten to eat. Took an extra share of the paperwork so Hopper could get home a little early and spend time with El -- it wasn't like there was anyone waiting up at home for him, anyways.

“What, like... fixing up the station?” Nancy asked, twirling a lock of wavy caramel hair around one pink tipped finger.

Hopper probably didn't want Steve blabbing all over town that he'd gone soft since becoming a parent, “Yeah, Nance,” and technically he wasn't lying. He *did* do general maintenance around the station, usually with one twerp or another at his side chattering incessantly, “didn't you notice the newly painted door? That was all me, sweetheart.”

He quickly glanced at Jonathan after throwing Nancy a totally hammed up wink -- because calling another guy's girl ‘sweetheart’ was frowned upon socially, and while all three of them had decided months ago that *that* was some misogynistic bullshit. Especially since Nancy was 100% the person most likely to survive a spontaneous monster attack. Not counting El, but including Hopper.

Jonathan just laughed along with Nancy.

“You're an idiot, Steve Harrington,” Jonathan said, and par the course the retort on his tongue was ‘And you're beautiful, Jonathan Byers’.

And, the thing was, all joking aside, Steve was pretty sure he meant it.

And, huh. Just *huh* . Wasn't that something to think about when he shuffled into the station, tired as hell but oddly content with his late night adventure.

El was in his chair, apparently choosing to spend a day of her leisurely Thanksgiving break with Hop Pop (which was the best nickname Steve had ever heard in his *life* and this kid had decided it without ever reading a Dr. Seuss book), though he was currently nowhere to be found.

"Hey, kiddo," Steve bumped their knuckles together briefly, "how's it goin? Where are the rest of the Nerd Brigade?"

El shrugged her shoulders, "Mike had a... dentist? Appointment. His mom will pick me up on their way home."

A dentist appointment the week of Thanksgiving, that was *rough* . "Poor dude."

Nodding her head solemnly, she went back to fiddling with the Rubix cube in her hands. Lucas had left it there the day before when he'd left in a hurry with Max, both of them scurrying out the back door at the faint sound of Billy's car.

The asshole didn't bother them much anymore, not since Steve made it very clear that he could and would, in fact, enjoy throwing his ass in jail. And even, before that. Since Max had jammed a needle into his neck and threatened to take out his boys with Steve's bat.

But, he was still around.

Like a fucking tumor.

"You know how to work one of those?" Steve asked, and immediately felt like a complete tool as El took one glance at him and the cube solved itself, a trickle of blood starting from her left nostril, "I meant with your hands, Houdini," he rolled his eyes as he handed her a tissue from the brightly colored box on Flo's desk.

Shrugging, which Steve took to mean *no* , she set the cube back down and looked at him expectantly. Though, he hadn't the faintest idea what she could possibly be expecting from *him* .

He liked El; she was quiet but brilliant once you actually got her going. She smiled over the small things. She stood firm in her *friends don't lie* principle, which in turn had everyone else being as transparent as a damn ghost.

She just didn't actively seek him out on her own. She tagged along with the rest of the ragamuffins, but one-on-one Steve and El time wasn't a thing that had ever happened before.

"What're you looking at?" He asked, self consciously looking down at himself. Had he left a button undone? Was there a stain?

"I'm waiting for a the fun," she said bluntly and Steve could do nothing but blink at her. *Waiting for the --*, "Dustin said that you bring fun."

Of course he did. The little shit.

"Dustin has a tendency towards hyperbole and a serious case of hero worship," Steve pointed out, but he did crack a smile and carefully step around the appropriated chair to open the bottom, left drawer of his desk, "but I do keep emergency Infant Supplies."

"I'm not an infant," El said immediately, her eyebrows furrowing, "I'm thirteen."

"It's a figure of speech," he waved one hand, the other digging through his stash before he found the comic he was looking for with a noise of triumph that Max told him sounded like a giraffe with the hiccups, "Here!"

El took the well loved copy of *The New Teen Titans* carefully, "A comic book?"

"Yeah, there's this character in it, Raven, she's from the planet Azeroth. She has mind powers, just like you." Steve grinned when El's eyes went wide and she looked at the comic in her hands with new interest, "Give it a read -- if you like it, we can get you some

more.”

“Really?” She asked, and there was the brightness that made her seem so different from the battered punk that had showed up at the Byers’ and saved all their asses, “There’s more?”

“Yeah. Honestly I can’t believe the kids haven’t shown you these, before.”

“They like the... blue man. With the ‘S’.”

“Superman.”

She nodded her head, curls flopping into her eyes before she brushed them away with the back of her hand, “Yes.”

“Yeah, well, give the Titans a chance. The leader, Robin, is Batman’s sidekick.”

“Leader *and* sidekick?”

“Different teams, different rules, kiddo. What can I say?”

Laughing softly, she leant back in Steve’s chair and flipped the book open, immediately devouring every word and picture on the page while Steve pulled up an uncomfortable visitors chair to the other side of the desk and started in on paperwork.

Companionable silence was the best kind of quiet. You got the peacefulness of the silence, but also you weren’t alone to drown in it. There was a friendly presence nearby, doing their own thing, just in the same general space as you. The option to talk was there, but it was only an option. There was no need to fill the air with mindless chatter.

It was the kind of stillness he was used to with Nancy and Jonathan, who would study quietly together while he read or drew or listened to a baseball game on a portable radio with his headphones. He missed it, since they’d left.

He wondered who they studied with. Jonathan in New York and Nancy in Massachusetts and Steve still... still in Hawkins.

Peeking up at El through his lashes, smile widening when she was completely engrossed in whatever Beast Boy and Cyborg were bickering about. He thought she'd like that.

She was a lot like Raven, really. And not just the mind powers.

Sensing someone watching her, she lifted her eyes to catch his, saw his smile, and very slowly, she smiled back.

Notes for the Chapter:

As always you can find me on Tumblr [here!](#) <3

Come talk to me, lurk on my dash and like everything I post, or even request a scene <3 I dont bite.

3. Chapter 3

Notes for the Chapter:

This scenario was requested by the absolutely lovely [PiperMashea](#) who refused to believe that Dustin would manage to restrain himself enough to n o t make Steve let them all squeeze into the cruiser.

“Can I turn on the lights?”

Steve turned in his seat, leveling what he hoped was a withering glare at Max, perched across Lucas’ and Mike’s lap in the backseat of the cruiser. There wasn’t a partition (“It’s a small town, kid,” Hopper had grumbled when Steve had brought it up, “On our budget we’re lucky to have *lights*.”) or room for all of them, really, which is why El and Max were sitting on laps and no one was wearing a goddamn seatbelt (or telling a n y of the parents that he let them talk him into this, fuck he was such a pushover it was going to get him drawn and quartered), but Dustin had begged.

And once Dustin got goin’ they *all* got goin’.

All Steve wanted was one (1) day that wasn’t completely shanghaied by eight-year-olds.

“The answer hasn’t changed since Dustin asked me five seconds ago.” Literally, five seconds. He’d counted in his head. Mississippi’s and everything. Because he knew -- *he knew* these goddamn kids.

“I bet you’d let Will turn on the lights,” Lucas accused and Steve’s eyebrows rose.

Will was the most behaved out of the bunch. Will never back talked him, or asked him the same question seventeen times in a row, or critiqued his fashion choices, *Maxine* .

“Were you kidnapped and then possessed by interdimensional hell beasts?” He asked, waiting for the other five (*five children, in his cruiser, w h a t*) to lower their eyes and sheepishly declare that no, no

they hadn't.

El raised one hand, "Bad men," she said, a wry smile playing on her lips as Will poorly hid a snort inside of a cough. "Lights?" She asked.

Great. Just great -- they were all against him now.

"I fucking guess," he finally concluded, making a show of shoving Dustin to the side so she could crawl into the front seat with them. She was small; she'd fit. Steve honestly wasn't sure why that hadn't been the original arrangement. They'd all just piled into the back seat without much thought towards the logistics.

Dustin squawked indignantly as El wiggled to make herself comfortable and grinned up at Steve -- since the morning at the station with the *Titans*, there had been several trips to the comic book store by the arcade to get more. Usually in the mornings, since Hopper firmly stood by the solemn fact that mornings were for coffee and contemplation.

Emphasis on the coffee.

"Button?" El asked.

Steve gestured wordlessly and quickly clapped his hands over his ears to dull the party's triumphant war cry as the sirens and lights atop the car came to life with a scream. Why were children so *loud*? Had he been this loud at thirteen?

Alone, none of them were particularly bothersome.

Dustin liked to read, and share the cool facts he learned *as* he read. His enthusiasm for subjects was infectious. Steve would normally end up abandoning whatever he had been doing to settle next to the kid and pour over the book with him. Dustin called them 'curiosity voyages'. Steve found he rather liked that.

Mike, as resident D.M, would scribble in a notebook for *hours*. Planning this or that campaign, asking for Steve's input here or there. *Would this be cooler? What do you think of...* Some of the things that could come out of that kid's imagination were astounding. Certainly nothing Steve would have thought up, especially not as a teenager.

One of these days, that kid was going to publish a novel and the world was going to lose its collective mind.

Will could draw like he was a machine. Anything. He'd cross his legs with his new sketch pad perched across his knees and his trusty box of crayons next to him and ask with big, curious eyes and an earnest smile what Steve thought he should draw. Sometimes Steve would answer with a question of his own; what was the last movie he saw? What did he dream about last night? (That one was pretty hit or miss). And sometimes he had actual input; one Tuesday morning Steve was *really* feeling dragons. Blue ones, who breathed ice instead of fire. That particular drawing hung in a frame over Steve's desk.

Lucas loved to be outside. He kept a compass in his pocket and would drag Steve into the woods to show him this, or that, to catch frogs at the creek, or investigate a caterpillar nest in one particular tree that only he could possibly know the exact location of because it was *one* tree in the *woods*, Lucas, that was not a thing that normal people knew. He also, bless his little heart, didn't make fun of Steve when he admitted that fucking shit those nests creeped him out, they looked like giant spider webs. (He had, however, introduced Steve to *The Lord Of The Rings* without first warning him about Shelob, the little s h i t.)

Max was the best damn video game buddy a perpetually exhausted deputy could ask for. Not just *Dig Dug* -- *Pac Man*, *Ballblazer*, she could kick his ass at any game he felt like having his ego crushed at. When he wasn't so dead, however, she was the only person he knew who genuinely, truly enjoyed baseball as much as he did -- and she was a hell of a pitcher. Which worked since he, obviously, had a hell of a swing.

(He's had a hell of a fun time teaching her how to properly use his monster smashing bat).

And El, El loved everything. El loved to read, and to draw, and to play, and to run, and to sit cross-legged on the sofa and eat her Eggo's while the rest of the munchkins argued over what they were going to do that day. She loved sunrises and sunsets. Fall leaves and twirling in wide circles under thunderclouds until her clothes were soaked and her head was spinning and all she could do was laugh and laugh and try not to fall over. And she loved dragging the rest of

them into it all, no matter what it was she was doing.

Alone, they were all their own person. One single voice. Together they were a goddamn symphony except no one had tuned their damn instruments and Steve couldn't stop listening because despite that it was still his favorite song.

Fucking twerps.

"That is enough of that," he said after far longer than he should have let the sirens go on for, "are you all happy, now?"

Six heads nodded emphatically.

Then.

"Hey," Max said, leaning forward between the seats, her cheek nearly pressed against El's as she reached for the radio dial and cranked it up, "I love this song."

Supertramp , not bad, kid.

"A little before your time, isn't it?" Steve asked instead of agreeing that the song was one of his favorites, "You're what? Three?"

For a three-year-old, the kid could punch.

Notes for the Chapter:

no guys seriously don't get used to these updates i just r e a l l y dont want to do my homework

and again don't forget that, like this one, other scenes can be requested! You just gotta ask, either in a comment here like Piper did or through my tumblr which is riiiiight [here!](#)

4. Chapter 4

Notes for the Chapter:

Everyone kept asking for angst why do you want to hurt my children

So some of you wanted Steve and any of the twerps, some of you wanted El, and some of you just wanted that good good father daughter bond with El and Hopper and fuck I picked the last one because weve had a lot of steve and 0 hopper

i need my grumpy dad, guys

also his perspective is fun to write from

The kid -- El, Jane, Eleven, whatever she wanted to be called, she seemed to be testing each name out, trying to decide what she liked best. Hopper just called her El like he always had, but he'd heard the rest of them, the kids that were so damn loyal to her, who cared *so damn much* they kidnapped their babysitter and literally climbed into hell just to buy her an extra ten minutes, switch between several different things-- she was *adjusting* .

She hadn't been happy about spending another year cooped up in that cabin, that was for goddamn sure, but he'd bought her one of those walkie-talkie things and let those other kids come visit her, so long as they were discreet about it. It was easy enough for the Wheeler kid, his parents never seemed to have a fucking *clue* what was going on, ever, as a general rule. He was over nearly every day after school got out, sometimes with one of the other's, sometimes without, and sometimes with *all* of them.

And wasn't that the goddamn weirdest thing - six teenagers squeezed into the tiny cabin, seven if he counted Harrington, but seeing as t h a t kid was in training so Hopper could hire him on as a deputy, it was hard to remember that he was only eighteen himself.

The older Wheeler, the girl with a hell of a shot and a wicked smile,

pretty even when she was covered in blood, and much, and whatever else, showed up with Will's brother, sometimes, and there had to be some kind of weird, love triangle thing happening because shit always seemed to get awkward as hell if they showed up at the same time as Harrington.

Hopper really, really did not want to know if there was. He just didn't want to stumble into anyone making out in his living room and really, really that didn't seem like too much to ask. He'd been suddenly thrust back into parenthood, except now he was dealing with a fully formed teenager who dressed like an MTV punk and he didn't even get a lead up to it.

One night he was leaving frozen waffles in a lockbox in the woods, and the next The Kid was standing there, scraggly and cold and so heartbreakingly alone. How could he have done anything but immediately tug her into his heart and keep her there?

Especially when she blinked huge eyes up at him, thirteen and six at the same time, because she could squish a man's eyeball with her mind but she'd never seen someone scramble eggs before and looked at him like he was the most amazing thing she'd ever seen.

She was less enthused when he'd introduced her to peas (and the Lima Bean Face was something he was going to chuckle about until he *died*, whether from old age or more Upside Down fuckery, it didn't matter, that was the best expression he'd ever seen) but not everything could be a hit and she ate them anyways -- at least if she wanted to retain her Eggo privileges.

And that kid fucking loved her Eggos.

She loved a lot of things, honestly, with the childlike wonder of someone who lived in a box their entire life. Every good thing to her was the *best* of the good things.

Every lasagna Joyce dropped by was the best lasagna she'd ever had. Every hand-me-down blouse from Nancy was the most beautiful shirt she'd ever owned (and damn if Hopper wasn't looking forward to the day that she was allowed out in public and he could spoil her with all *new* clothes that she picked out and loved). Every sunset was the

most wonderful end to the most wonderful day she'd ever had.

Especially if Wheeler was around.

She liked that kid a whole goddamn lot, too.

Let him reiterate his desire to never walk in on anyone kissing on his couch. Maybe Flo could needlepoint him something.

Still, she was adjusting. Adjusted, even. At least compared to where she was when he found her.

Except, of course, for the nightmares.

Sara had had her fair share of bad dreams, particularly during long nights spent in sterile white hospital rooms with none of the yellow-walled comforts of her room at home. But Sara, thankfully, didn't make the entire house shake with her nightmares.

Sara had her dream, woke up, and then pad her little self from her bed over to her parents' room, or the sofa, or wherever he happened to be asleep in that moment --if he even was asleep-- and pat him on the cheek until he noticed her. Then she'd crawl into his arms and go back to sleep. Occasional tears, moreso closer to the... to the end.

But El wasn't Sara.

Which he knew, logically. His heart, however, just saw *My Girl* and *Hurting* in the same sentence and immediately jumped into overdrive.

That could have also been the sheer panic of waking up in a bed that was a foot and a half off of the ground.

An old pro at the art of throwing himself from a high, wobbly mattress in the quickest, least painful way possible --this was nowhere near the first time that this has happened that *week* -- Hopper was out of his room and sprinting across the formerly tiny square footage of the cabin in seventeen seconds. Highball.

My Girl. Hurting .

El didn't make a peep in her sleep. Her jaw clenched so tightly that

Hopper had played with the idea of maybe trying to find her one of those mouth guard things, because that couldn't be good for her teeth, before he decided that would probably be one of those triggering things that ended up just making the nightmares worse and defeating the whole point.

Her furniture, the little desk, the chair, the bookshelf that held old textbooks from every one of her friends and notebook after notebook filled with her efforts to catch up before she was allowed to start high school in the fall ("Like a real girl," she'd said, her cheeks dimpling) were in a similar state to his bedroom furniture and everything in the living room.

It was a bad one.

"Ellie," he couldn't touch her until things had stopped levitating. He'd tried that once and ended up nearly thrown through a wall, "kid, you gotta wake up." Standing by her bed, nearly shouting, while she looked like something out of *The Exorcist* was, somehow, not even a contender on the list of Weird Shit Jim Hopper Had Done, but it was definitely up there with the distressing things.

God, he just wanted it all to *stop* for her. She'd been through hell and come out the other side, only to be thrust back into it again, and again. This kid. His kid. Fuck, if anyone in the entire weird world deserved a break it was her.

Curly haired, and soft, and crying. Tangled in her blanket and one of his old flannels. Screaming inside of her mind where no one could hear her, but screaming all the same.

There was a lullaby he'd sung to Sara, and now to her. It wasn't really a lullaby, honestly. It was just a song that he'd heard, and that had made his infant daughter stop crying. Which made it a lullaby, he figured.

And now, years later, it was damn near the only thing that could calm El down besides That Wheeler Kid, and he wasn't going to radio the kid at three AM unless he absolutely had to.

By the middle of the verse, the bed hit the ground, and El hit the bed,

the impact startling her wide awake with an aborted shout.

Like a charm.

She looked around her, wild hair bouncing and wilder eyes wide as they settled on him, close enough to touch, but not, clad in pajamas in a still dark bedroom. She slumped back against the pillows. Wiped her wet cheeks and bloody nose on the cuff of her shirt.

“You want to talk about it?” He asked, like he did every time.

“No,” she said shortly, keeping her eyes firmly on a loose thread in her quilt.

“Do you want me to stay?”

Instead of answering, the spare pillow that lived on the chair during the day floated itself over to the unused side of her bed and settled at the head, next to hers. Grown men weren't supposed to lay in beds with little girls over a certain age, and while Hopper understood that unwritten rule entirely (while, thankfully, that hadn't been something he'd had to deal with in Hawkins during his time as sheriff, because he would have had to arrest *himself* for murder, he'd read the newspaper every morning since he was fifteen) it wasn't anyone's goddamn business.

She was thirteen, but she was scared. She was his *kid* and she was *scared* and he didn't care what the fucking world said, he cared what she *needed* and what she *needed* was him to climb into bed with her and wrap her in his arms and never let anything bad happen to her ever again.

And by God, he was going to give that to her and if anyone had a problem with it they could talk to his fist.

Or maybe Joyce -- that woman was scarier when it came to her children than he could ever hope to be.

After they were settled, with El tucked against his chest, her cheek pressed against his heart, the book they were reading started to tap his shoulder incessantly.

Any other time, he would have reminded her that they'd talked about using words, *and hands*, given that she was supposed to be integrated into society soon. But, there were times and there were places for those reminders and this was neither.

"One more chapter," he conceded because it was so late, and his eyes were burning, but he wasn't going to deny her something as simple as *reading*, "where were we? Do you remember?"

"Seven," she said, softly, before peeking up at him, "you called me... El..lie?"

Had he?

"Well, you are trying out names. And it has 'El' right in it."

She hummed thoughtfully before nodding her head, just slightly, "I like it." A pause, "But only you."

Hopper hid his smile in her hair, "Only me," he agreed. He liked that.

A few moments passed in companionable silence. Then, "Read, please."

Right, right. He couldn't just sit there being sappy all night when there were Indians in cupboards to be discovered, "Chapter seven," he said, flipping the book open to the correct page easily since he finally drilled the idea of a fuckin bookmark into his kid's head. Jesus.

"Omri was not supposed to ride his bicycle in the road..."

Notes for the Chapter:

god its 230 and im so tired but i hadn't written in like 3 days (fun fact, The Exorcist on fox is goddamn addicting) and i wanted to give you guys soooooomethng

Don't forget you can find me on tumblr right [here!](#) if

you need to scream about our children or even
request things - this isn't chronological it's just a
mismatch of whatever the fuck i want to write

5. Chapter 5

Summary for the Chapter:

For the Anon on tumblr who wanted Hopper making clear that he'd never hurt El like Papa had.

Notes for the Chapter:

The shortest one yet because hahaha I had an Oceanography test and a math test this week im so tired pls kill me

Eggs splattered the carpet, the walls, and even the corner of Hopper's blanket that was hanging off of his bed. The plate was plastic so it didn't break but the mug that held the coffee was... not so lucky.

El, Ellie --she liked that, but only from Hopper. No one else could call her Ellie. Not even Mike -- was frozen, staring down at the mess. She'd tripped, over the stupid wood strip in the doorway. It had been like a scene from a movie-- the tray had gone flying and as she'd landed on the ground, everything exploded into absolute, breakfast food covered chaos.

She'd just wanted to make him breakfast in bed, like they did on t.v. because on the calendar under the number 15, in pretty, slanted print, were the word's *Father's Day* and that meant that it was like... a holiday. About fathers. And Hopper was her father, kind of? So she'd wanted to do something nice.

And she'd messed it up.

The eggs were a little dry -- it was only her second time making them-- and the coffee was a little burnt --because the machine was, to quote Steve, ancient-- but it had been presentable enough until it had all ended up on the floor.

El's eyes burned as Hopper peered at her, wide-eyed, from his bed.

"Ellie?"

El flinched back, tears spilling over and trailing down her cheeks. She was going to be in so much trouble. He was probably so mad at her.

She knew, she *knew* that Hopper wasn't Papa, that sometimes he would yell and scream and then she would yell and scream but he would never hurt her. He was soft, under the scruffy beard and the cigarette smoke.

Still. Her heart hammered in her chest, an automatic fear response making her lungs shrivel up and her stomach ache. She'd done bad; made a mistake. There wasn't room for mistakes, there wasn't--

"Kid!" Hopper was on his knees in front of her, smack-dab in the middle of the mess, helping her sit up, looking at her rug burned palms with a wince while not even glancing at the broken ceramic or the egg. "Are you alright?"

El was shaking. The furniture trembled right along with her. Was she alright? No, no, she had made a mess. There was a mess all around them. She needed to clean it up, she needed... what did she need? "I'll get a rag!" She blurted, scrambling to her feet so suddenly that she nearly slammed her forehead into Hopper's.

"Whoa, whoa," Hopper followed her from the room, trying to catch up to the curly haired comet his kid had turned into as she rummaged under the sink for their cleaning supplies, "kid, where's the fire?"

He was there when she turned around, grabbing her wrists in his hands and frowning down at her face; confused, she recognized, not mad. Not confused, *worried* .

"I... I made a mess," she said, looking back towards his bedroom, "I'm sorry."

"I don't care about the damn mess," he barked, immediately softening as El seemed to shrink, hunching her shoulders and looking down. He let her go. "I care about you. You had to hit the ground pretty hard to make a crash like that."

Her knees burned. And her hands -- her left wrist, as well, where

she'd caught herself as she fell. Scared. "I made a mess," she repeated.

"You *fell* ," Hopper stressed, "and you're shaking. Are. Are you afraid of me?" He took two steps back.

"Papa would--" he'd punish her. Electricity. More training. More-- "bad." She said after a moment, looking up at him though considering eyes, "You're not papa." Hesitantly she held a hand out, palm up, "Not mad?"

"Not mad, kid," Hopper took her hand, using it to tug her into a hug that felt like it was from a bear, squeezing the air from her lungs. But in the good way. No shriveling. No stomach ache. Warmth, "Why did you try to make breakfast, anyways?"

El mumbled into his shirt, barely audible through the fabric and the actual mass of his chest, "Father's day."

"Father's--" he broke off to look at the calendar, then squeezed her a little tighter. His damn *kid* . "You didn't have to go through so much trouble for me, kid."

Shaking her head, El finally peeked up through her eyelashes, worrying her bottom lip between her teeth, "Wanted to," she insisted, pointing to herself, "Ellie," she pointed at him, "Dad."

Dad .

There was something he'd never thought he would get to hear again. A little girl calling him dad; even if his girl wasn't so little, "Dad," he agreed, pressing a kiss to his girl's forehead and then rubbing his shin against her face just for the indignant squeaking that always came with it.

"Dad!" El complained, ducking out of his arms and scampering to the other side of the kitchen, "Scratchy!"

"Kinda the point, Kiddo," he was grinning like an idiot but... she called him dad. She tried to make him breakfast for father's day. She *did* , actually, make it. It was apparently the delivery that was her downfall, "How 'bout I go clean up the bedroom and you start

another batch of eggs, huh?”

But it was *her* mess, “I should--”

“There’s broken glass all over the floor,” he shook his head, “you could cut yourself. I’ll take care of it. You know how friends don’t lie?” At her nod he continued, “Dads protect daughters.”

“Dads protect daughters,” she repeated, trying the phrase out before grinning toothily and nodding, dimples on full display. That was the difference between Dads and Papas.

Dads protect.

Notes for the Chapter:

Dads Protect Daughters is like my dad's fucking motto so.

He bought me a car (!!!!!) for an early Christmas present -- i love her her name is Jane-- and he has gone over that thing with a fine tooth comb ok and ordered me a new side mirror and is looking into how to install cruise control

Dads protect.

Don't forget you can find me on tumblr right [here!](#) if you wanna chat or whateeeever.

6. Chapter 6

Summary for the Chapter:

all y'all asked for Steve and Dustin being cute and fuck me if i wasnt gonna deliver

Notes for the Chapter:

slinks in I can explain I swear.

I... had finals. And. Then my house was a revolving door of friends celebrating the holiday break, and also another friends birthday (which hahaha long story short I took my algebra exam s o hungover but still got an a in the class im so good) and then a friend of mine was in a drag show at a club two hours away and basically this is the first second ive gotten to actually finish and post this thing

Sorry!!!

The Hawkins Audio Visual Club had a thing about promises, which Steve quickly caught on to. You didn't make a promise lightly to those kids. It was a solemn oath, basically written in blood across the crazy patchwork their lives had become. They took solace in it. If you *promised* something you had damn well be planning on delivering.

There were no pie-crust-promises permitted.

When Mike promised to be on the radio for El at exactly 8:15 (8-1-5) Steve would bet his car that the kid was there at 8:12 sharp to find her already in the void and waiting to greet him with one of those cheek dimpling smiles of hers.

And when Steve promised to pick Dustin up for a night of mostly well-mannered frivolity (Dustin's words, not Steve's by any stretch of the imagination -- and what kind of self-respecting teenager uses words like *frivolity* in everyday conversation, Henderson, really) his Farrah Fawcett Sprayed ass was going to be there to steal the kid

away for some quality sibling bonding.

Nevermind that they weren't technically related, Claudia had all but adopted him the moment she saw him and had been shoving cookies into his hands and pressing pink stained kisses to his cheeks ever since.

Dustin was the tiny, round-cheeked, curly-haired little brother he'd secretly always wanted but never gotten. His parents didn't even seem to want him, let alone another.

And, shit, honestly he almost understood because kids were *exhausting*, and needy, and didn't seem to register that he'd already worked ten hours that day keeping Hawkins safe from the petty crime that rampaged it when the Upside Down was kept in check, and he had *six* of them constantly crawling all over him.

The difference, between Steve and his parents, was that he never even considered letting his exhaustion turn into resentment. Exasperation? Hell yes. Did he get snappy? Sometimes. Would he be completely lost without them? Absolutely.

So, he was sweaty, and dirty from chasing those *goddamn* Gilmore kids through the Tree Farm while they brandished *firecrackers* --and hey, that cracked the case of who stole a case of the damn things from Melvald's. He hadn't even had time to stop by his apartment and change because he'd said 9, so they could catch a late movie, and a promise is a promise.

Even if he felt like absolute death and probably smelled worse when he gently knocked his knuckles against the Henderson's front door.

Claudia answered, all warm smiles and bright, crinkled eyes as she ushered him inside the warmth of the house. He stomped the snow off his boots on the mat, because he was not a complete neanderthal, thank you, Lucas.

"Stevie," she cooed, reaching up to rub some of the grime from his face with her thumb, "you're filthy."

Fidgeting sheepishly, he raked a hand through his hair, "Didn't have

time to change,” he said, “said I’d be here at nine. Friends don’t lie, and all that jazz.” He paused, “I won’t like... sit on anything and get it dirty.”

“Oh, please,” she waved him off, “that’s not what I’m worried about. Lord knows Dusty tracks in pounds of dirt daily with all of his little voyages,” that eye-crinkling smile was back. Motherly in a way that his had never been, “I just figured it couldn’t be comfortable, is all.”

Steve was... unreasonably touched. He still wasn’t entirely used to people giving a damn as to whether he was comfortable or not, just for the sake of *caring* about him. He was King Steve (he was never King Steve). He was good, he was okay, he was fine -- even when he was falling apart at the seams.

“I’ll be fine,” he assured her, looking towards the stairs and making a face, “Someone will be walking to the movies, though, if they’re not down here in less than thirty seconds!” He called.

Something clattered to the ground with a thunk above their heads, around the approximate space that Dustin’s bedroom floor took up.

“Son of a *bitch* !”

“Watch your language!” Claudia and Steve called back, simultaneously, without missing a beat.

Jesus Christ, he really was a mom.

Dustin’s curly head popped around the banister, the expression on his face a ridiculous mix of complete exasperation and utter hilarity, “Sorry, *moms* .”

“You think I’m joking about leaving you here! Just try me, twerp!”

“Keep your pants on, Harrington,” said twerp was unimpressed by Steve’s threats, not that he’d expected any less. He sauntered down the stairs two minutes and thirty-seven seconds past when Steve *should* have just left him.

“Took you long enough,” Steve grunted, reaching out to bump his knuckles against the kid’s pudgy cheeks.

“Yeah, yeah,” Dustin ducked out of the way of Steve’s hand and hugged his mother goodbye, “You look like shit, by the way,” he said as the front door shut behind them.

Steve rolled his eyes skyward. What had he done to deserve this? “I spent all day dealing with the Gilmores.”

“Did they really set the Christmas trees on fire?”

“Don’t go getting any ideas,” Steve warned around a groan as he slumped into the seat of his car. Christ, he never should have let this kid pick his career path. He was *sore* , and *exhausted* , and his hair had gone *flat* .

He hated that.

Dustin was frowning, a strange thing on his normally grinning face, “Hey,” he said, unusually gently, “we don’t have to go out tonight if you’re not feeling good, dude.”

Steve opened his mouth to say he was fine --which, he was-- but what came out was an angry sounding cough because he’d been running through smoke all day and the world still smelled a little like sulfur and his lungs were *pissed* .

The kid shook his head, the decision apparently made, “Get out of the car,” he demanded.

As the cold air hit his face, Steve had a moment of clarity when he realized he’d just let a fourteen-year-old boss him around.

He was too tired to really give a shit. He was too tired to do much more than look at Dustin and kind of gesture like, *okay, now what* ?

“Inside,” he pointed back the way they’d come, to his own front door, “we’re going to lay around on the couch, and order pizza, and watch something on VHS.”

And, shit, that really did sound way better than going out anywhere.

“First, you’ve gotta shower though, dude, you smell like a fire demon’s asshole.”

Jesus, even that made Steve's heart give a funny, fond lurch, and he stepped around the car to pull the kid into a hug that he'd deny was for anything other than revenge.

"Demon's asshole, huh?!" He asked, heaving a big, croaking laugh as Dustin shrieked and tried to break his grip.

What he really meant to say, however, wasn't quite that.

It was something more along the lines of *Best Little Brother Ever*.

Sappy, he knew.

But sue him.

Notes for the Chapter:

did mary just reference a shania twain song? yes, yes she did.

Don't forget you can find me on tumblr right [here!](#)

7. Chapter 7

You can't choose your family -- except when you could.

Steve's parents didn't want anything to do with him, and it had hurt for a while. It felt like a sucking chest wound in the center of his being. But, then he fought monsters in Jonathan Byers' kitchen (twice) and helped one (1) tiny human with his hair and... somehow? Adopted? Six children?

Most with good parents already in Claudia, and Joyce, and the Sheriff, and the Sinclair's. And though, the Wheeler's were just about as useless as a tangled slinky, they weren't *bad* .

Not like Max's family.

Steve swore up and down that he didn't pick favorites, he hated all of his little twerps equally *now get off of the cruiser, it's not a jungle gym, you brats!* But he didn't go out of his way for the other's the way he did for Max.

She was stronger than she looked, made of steel and barbed wire, twisted and bent into the shape of a little girl with a will of iron and a wickedly sharp tongue.

She had to be; no one was ever in her corner. Not until she moved to Hawkins and now there were *so many* people ready to murder someone for her and make it look like an accident -- she got overwhelmed sometimes. Would pull her hood up and tug her sleeves down to cover her hands, wearing the worn, soft cotton like armor.

Steve got that. Really, if the baseball bat that lived in his trunk spoke to anything it was his ability to understand.

But, honestly, that jacket was a travesty and it would do exactly nothing to keep her warm once winter really set in. It had to go.

He'd dated Nancy Wheeler. He knew how to shop. He knew what he was doing. He had it *covered* right up until the moment he stepped into Sears and nearly had a heart attack.

With winter coming, the store was plastered in jackets of every shape, bulk, and color imaginable. There were colors he didn't *recognize* , and he was pretty sure they taught you all of them before they let you out of kindergarten.

Would Max prefer a peacoat? A bomber? A chesterfield (*what the hell even is that?*) ? A raincoat? A trench?

All he wanted was a goddamn jacket for his goddamn child .

Nancy, beautiful, perfect, blessed Nancy, who had nothing better to do on her long weekend than drag her boyfriend around several hundred department stores for no other reason than to save her ex-boyfriend from drowning under over-dyed fabric of occasionally dubious integrity somewhere in the middle of the Junior's section of the local Macy's (which was still nearly 45 miles away, Hawkins, *why* ?)

"She likes yellow," Nancy said, picking up a normal looking jacket in JCPenney's and holding it up for inspection; after a few moment of careful scrutiny, she nodded and shoved it at Steve's chest, "Get her a scarf to go with it."

"You're beautiful, Nancy Wheeler," he breathed, and in the overly harsh lights, with a quarter of her hair escaping her ponytail to frizz around her face, and her lips bitten and chapped with her hand clasped in another's, she was.

Jonathan produced a scarf from seemingly thin air and Steve just knew that it was perfect, "This scarf," he said, teasing but not patronizing, "and the check out is over there." He jerked his thumb and Steve almost wanted to kiss him.

Steve did want to kiss him.

Steve wanted to kiss them both.

Steve Harrington wanted to kiss both Nancy Wheeler and Jonathan Byers.

What .

"Thanks," he managed to choke out, nearly running for the cashier.

The car ride back was going to be a real barrel of laughs.

But Christ on a goddamn pogostick, it was worth it.

"Take that off," Steve ordered, once Max had deposited her skateboard onto the floor and flopped gracelessly into the passenger seat. There were fat, fluffy flurries falling from the sky -- angry, swirling gray that promised the snowfall would not stay gentle for long.

"What?" Max looked alarmed, her face paling, and Steve swore loudly before reaching behind his seat and tugging the neatly wrapped gift box into the front.

"I got you something," he said, shifting gears and starting the familiar five minute trek to Dustin's house; "that jacket is a rag, kid."

Max was running her fingers over the soft fabric, sniffing hard and her eyes suspiciously wet, "A new jacket?" She croaked, like the world's most fiery frog.

"And a scarf," Steve motioned to the smaller bundle of tissue paper in the corner of the box, "Nancy and Jonathan picked them out, I just bankrolled it. Hawkin's winters are a lot harsher than California's. Didn't want you turning into a Mad Max-cicle."

With the old jacket discarded behind her, thrown into the back like the useless rag it was, and the new one zipped up to her chin, she turned the full force of her grin on Steve as he pulled into the Henderson's driveway and lay on the horn because *this child was apparently genetically unable to get ready on t i m e* .

"You got me a jacket and a scarf," she said, her fingers twisted in the mentioned scarf, "because you noticed mine wasn't thick enough?"

Was that a question?

"Yes?" Steve tried.

Then, he was sputtering indignantly around a cloud of orange hair as Max flung herself across the gearshift and center console to wrap her arms around his neck so tightly he thought she might be trying to kill him for a moment.

She made a noise that for a moment sounded like sobs, but then turned into something more like laughter.

“No one has ever cared enough about me to notice anything like that before,” she said into his collar.

“I’m a damn good babysitter, kid,” he said, and while two years prior he would have been uncomfortable and so, so, so awkward, Now Steve, who fought monsters and cared about people with reckless abandon, just pressed a kiss to the side of her tiny head and held on a little tighter.

“Nah,” Max said, settling back in her seat and wiping at her eyes with the sleeve of her new jacket as Dustin flew out his front door, still stuffing things into his bursting backpack, “You’re a damn good big brother.

Notes for the Chapter:

rises from the dead in my defense, two of my best friends got married and i got engaged.

Don't forget you can find me on tumblr right [here!](#) if you wanna talk about our children or request something or ask about The Fiance who I will talk about f o r e v e r if you let me lbr

Author's Note:

Don't forget you can find me on tumblr right [here!](#) if you need to scream about our children or even request things - this isn't chronological it's just a

mismatch of whatever the fuck i want to write